

ONE STEP FROM REALITY



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A 'Wannabe' Writer craves to be the Author of the Great Australian Novel.

For his efforts he has penned sixty-nine Crime Novellas of a questionable standard, but at least his efforts have achieved some success on the 'Web' with his list of crime stories producing over one hundred thousand downloads!

Still, he strives for more.

To obtain some authenticity in his latest offering, he thinks to commit the perfect murder would result in a 'Best Seller'. But the perfect murder is difficult to imagine and even more difficult to achieve...to carry out...and he is frightful of the punishment if by chance he was arrested and charged...it then not being the perfect murder after all.

He is arrested for the slaying of a young woman that he never knew...and though he is aware of his innocent, he continues with the farce for research-sake, assured that his innocence will prevent him from ever being charged with the homicide. It strikes him in a moment of clarity that if he does carry out that perfect murder and authors a story on the event, he is constructing his own confession...

He was playing a dangerous game...

Where does research for another spine-chilling fiction saga stop and reality kick in?

What is the distance between fact and fiction; sanity and insanity; truth, fantasy and whimsy; dream and nightmare?

ONE STEP FROM REALITY

Detective Grade Four Joseph Lind
Detective Two Angelica ^{with} 'Angie' De Longo

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CHAPTER ONE

He leant back in his Office Chair pleased with what he had written in the past hour or three. He always tried to write at least one Chapter a day...he was keeping up with that principle having written three Chapters in the time he sat in front of his computer on this occasion. In his mind he already had the ending thought out though he was several chapters away from those finishing words and signing his initials 'pcb' at the end with the date ensuring its fate for eternity. He had skipped dinner as the thoughts whirled around inside his head...he had to get them down in the computer and the 'Cloud' to ensure his latest efforts were not lost to the grey matter...or the forgotten fly-away thought. He glanced at the time in the bottom corner of his computer screen, surprised that it was just past three in the morning!

He wasn't feeling tired, more exhilarated at what he had achieved. He decided he'd go for a jog to see what might happen...he could think clearly late at night as he jogged around the streets that formed the perimeter of the 18-hole golf course that was adjacent to his Unit complex. He needed a hook...a murder that was plausible...one that bamboozled the cops...one that totally confused his famous creation, Detective Joseph Lind who was now on his downhill slide to retirement.

As he'd experienced before, a jog in the early morning air sometimes loosened that thread...that line of thought that could grow into a story...it happened sometimes. It was a solution that was successful for around fifty percent of the time that he practised the habit.

Creek Road was a busy arterial road on the eastern extremity of the Golf Course. He didn't need his headlamp on because the streetlights and the occasional passing car gave him all the illumination he required. A late-night reveller heading for home. An early morning 'starter' driving to work. The footpath on this length of the golf course though was dangerous. Erupting at spots where tree roots forced the concrete to buckle, crack and erupt.

On the opposite or western side of the golf course he could jog on the road as there was no council footpath. His headlamp showing the way as streetlights were limited on the length of this street called Burton Street. Named after a local Councillor of long ago more than likely. His cynicism showing through.

You had to be careful. He'd learnt from experience as he even had tripped and fallen in broad daylight on broken sections of the decayed Council footpath. It was about time they did something about it he thought vaguely as he kept up a steady pace!

He heard the soft shoosh of flying fox winging home from a night scavenging for food. It could have been an Owl swooping onto an unsuspecting prey...he waited for the shriek of

surprise then panic from the prey that didn't come...he really didn't know but the thought of a silent killer teased at his synapses...a story could be forming. His foot caught on something...probably a damaged section of footpath and he found himself tripping and falling. He scrapped the palms of his hands, his knuckles and his knees as he hit the ground hard, not having learnt the art of rolling with the fall. He grazed his knees badly and he thought he dislocated something like his shoulder as he landed heavily. He lay still in some type of shock before he rolled onto his knees which hurt like hell. He carefully propped himself against a nearby tree trunk with some difficulty realising he had done some damage to himself. He again sat still, his feet now in the gutter until his brain popped into gear. He rummaged in his bum-pack for his mobile phone hoping like hell it hadn't been damaged during his fall...no, it was fine, but the slight salty taste of blood in his mouth told him he had done some damage.

He dialled in for an Ambulance not sure whether he had any broken bones...or where he was...or who he was...he hurt bad all over his body...he needed help. Blood was dripping into his eyes though he didn't seem to be aware of that fact. Triple zero was about the easiest thing he could do...though he did not offer any information. His location was determined by magic he would never understand. The connection left open so that his location could be tabulated...triangulated to flash his location back to the Triple 'O' base.

CHAPTER TWO

The bloke covered in blood and semi-conscious at that stage swiped at something that was making him feel uncomfortable. His arm felt like lead not obeying any signals he sent. It didn't do what he wanted it to do...in fact it had hardly moved! He tossed his head about in frustration...that was about the only part of his body that was obeying the signals.

"Whoa...mate. Take it easy. You've got a nasty cut on yer head which we're trying to bandage up...to quell the bleeding...yeah, a nasty cut...and you've suffered some sort of trauma to your spine so take it easy, eh?"

"What happened?" The patient said in a slurred soft voice. "What? I've got a nasty cut on my scalp. Eh? What happened?" He again slurred trying hard to recall the events earlier in the night...but any memory of what may have occurred earlier that night wouldn't come to him.

"That's what we want to know...we're gunna move you onto a gurney so's we can get yer into the ambulance and away to the nearest hospital...if there's no hassles...take it easy, eh?"

“Yeah...I guess so...no worries.” He again slurred quietly, more to himself. But as they moved him a swell of pain passed through his entire body. He gasped in agony as they moved him as quickly but gently onto the gurney sticking something into his mouth that eased the pain.

“Let us get you there to the hospital, okay? What’s yer name?”

“Arrh...um...I’m not too sure...”

“The bump on yer head will do that every time. Give it a chance. Your memory will come back to you in a flood...I should know, I’ve seen it so many times. Yer sure gave yerself a decent clout to the head...or did she dish out as much as you gave?”

He wondered what the Ambo was dribbling on about. Nothing made sense. He felt himself relax as he was laid gently on the gurney and took several sucks on the candy stick that the female Ambo had given him. Another figure came into his line of sight. A copper...what was a copper doing here? He thought to himself.

“Your name sir”. Authoritarian. Assertive. “Do you live close by? What were you doing out at four in the morning? Looking for suitable victims, eh?”

The words didn’t compute.

“It’s no good, Detective...he’s out of it. He’s taken a fair bump to his forehead. Looks like she gave almost as good as she got from the bastard. You should be able to get his information through his mobile phone. Name. Address. So on...”. The Ambo offered as he began to slide the gurney into the rear of the Ambulance. The unconscious bloke had not discerned that both his hands had paper bags over them...

“Yes”. The Detective replied. “The Mobile is now with the Forensic Trace team hopefully...they’ll make the ID and let us know...have a good night.” The copper offered to the disappearing Ambulance. A need for siren and flashing lights as the patient was injured that required immediate hospital attention so they asserted. The clout to his head was worrying. The non-action to a scrape of the bottom of the foot indeed concerning as they assumed an injury to the man’s spine was assured. He was trussed tightly onto a ‘back and neck’ restraint to minimise further damage.

CHAPTER THREE

“That is a nightshift Case, isn’t it?” I responded angrily looking at my junior partner. “What’s wrong with them keeping it? Fucking jeezzz...alright! ALRIGHT! Alright...” I repeated yielding to the suggestion that it was now ours. I held up my hands in surrender. I was never going to win when the decision had already been made. I glanced at Angie as I spun to return to my desk. She had a funny look on her face as though my mood this morning wasn’t to be tolerated. She followed me to my desk and as I slumped dejectedly into my desk chair she stood in front of me, a stern expression on her face, hands on hips as a woman would stand who was about to have her pound of flesh from her senior partner’s rump!

“What’s got up your arse when you weren’t looking?” She berated as she looked down at me.

Yeah...she was right. I shook my head slowly, raising my hands as an apology.

“I don’t ...yeah...sorry...it’s a rare morning when I spring out of bed welcoming a glorious day...or wanting to come to work for that matter. The magic has gone. It’s a real struggle every bloody morning...having a shower and a shave before getting dressed for another day is a real struggle that seems like it’s been that way for ages”.

“Mmm...you need a break...” She responded like Doctor Google, nodding at her assessment as though it was gospel.

“I’ve just come back from a week off...a couple of months ago I guess.” I responded weakly. I really wasn’t up to parrying with my young colleague...I just wanted to go home and curl up under my favourite doona.

“Go see your doctor. He’s been your doctor for how long?”

“Gawd...most of my life...what do you think he will recommend?” I enquired sarcastically.

“Early retirement...” She quickly replied cheekily as she sat at her desk, spinning her chair around to face me.

“Arrh...jeezuz...fuck! What!?” I wasn’t into humour this morning. “I’ve got seven years before I can officially retire...maybe only a couple of years if I take all that is owing to me and then some...finding a cooperative doctor who will grant me sick leave getting rid of every day it had accrued...I think I could walk out the door tomorrow...that however, is not going to solve my...morose attitude. My depression and anger...my quick temper that seems to ignite at a drop of a hat...no. I doubt my doctor has any remedy to solve that which is just old

age and thoughts that I'd seen it all before...twice over in a career that has spanned over forty-five years. I'm the oldest and most senior Detective on the floor who possibly should have thought about a shift to another Branch some time ago to ease myself into old age...being a Murder Dee with the expectancy that the following day will bring the next bloodied body into view...that is not a good wake-up call every day...".

"A desk job until you can run out your sick leave, time off in lieu amounts, annual holidays and long service leave..."

"Mmm...I thought of that, but it doesn't thrill me...I'll be by myself until Tellie can retire and that's at least another ten years away".

"Joe? At some time or other you are going to step on the wrong toes what with your attitude now and you could lose all those entitlements if you do, let me tell you". As though she was that 'Man of Wisdom' who lived atop the Mountain of Truth.

"Mmm..." I slipped my boots off and settled down, slipping further down my chair with my feet up onto the pulled open lower drawer side...I could sleep in that position...and almost did nod off!!

CHAPTER FOUR

"Arrh, Detective. I'm afraid our patient is in no condition to be questioned to-day. He is constantly in and out of consciousness and his speech is slurred beyond recognition. That hit on his head has caused severe bleeding on the brain that if not caught at the time it would mean he wouldn't be lying here as my patient...or your suspect..."

"He should be handcuffed to the bed". I asserted looking closely at the unconscious patient.

"Now Detective. That's a little over the top, don't you think? Look at him, sir. He's not going anywhere for the foreseeable future...and if he tried, I could assure you he would just fall out of the bed...no Detective, he's staying where he is without the need for over-the-top restrictions."

"He selected a young woman at random and belted her so viciously, she died at the scene. I also want a guard twenty-four-seven at this door...I'll organise both, Doctor. When he wakes and can identify himself, I want you to immediately notify me. Understood!?"

The doctor shifted uncomfortably. He had never been ordered so forcefully by anyone for a patient who when he woke would still be incapable of moving from his bed...and there would be a series of operations that the man still required that ensured he remained where he was...unhindered!

The Detective seemed to ignore his pleas and as he walked away, he shouted over his shoulder that a guard would be present within an hour or two...that was it! No concerns shown on the patient's prognosis or outcome. He saw the lump of flesh lying in the hospital bed with tubes from every orifice as the 'perp'...the guilty person, nothing more...and the presence of an armed guard would send shivers down every patient's spine as this to them all would mean a dangerous felon was nearby!

The man was oblivious to any other thing relating to the man's life.

"What a complete arsehole...a little concern on the part of the copper would have made all the difference in the world regardless of the guilt or not of my patient", the doctor thought to himself as he made his way to the Nurses' Station to ring his concerns through to the hospital administrator. A formal complaint to the Police Force and to the Murder Squad would be the outcome.

CHAPTER FIVE

As soon as Joe unlocked the front door, Angie De Longo could smell books...the paperback variety. There were stacks of them lined neatly down the entry corridor more than a metre high. No thought to size or arrangement so it appeared. A higgledy-de-higgledy compilation of various subjects. Fiction mostly but there was a fair selection of other types...mostly of WW2 subjects.

The other thing she could smell was dog.

"He has a dog". Detective De Longo offered as though her detective training and her sensitive olfactory sense was successful.

"Yes...a cute little thing. The next-door neighbour has it..." The first time that I showed any sort of warmth according to Angie's next comments. She added her opinion of a person now clinging to life.

"He has led a cluttered existence..."

“Oh, I don’t know, there’s a neatness to it. Sure, there is not that much available space, but it is neat and tidy in a familiar sort of way. He has surrounded himself with those things that mean something to him. Give him warmth. According to the next-door neighbour...a Mz Murielle Webster who I am sure is a transgender person, most of the furniture here he has made himself...a good quality craftsman I reckon looking at some of the things...like that table...beautiful. I wish I could do the same...if I had the time. That set of shelving in the Hallway with all those books and bric-a-brac stuff on them. That’s retro at its best. A couple of building planks supported on bricks that he has scrounged from close-by building sites...I had one like that during my Uni days way back after I finished with my undercover days...just bits of scrap timber on a couple of concrete blocks. A bit rickety which if you happen to crash into during one of those drunken sojourns tended to rock over...hah! Even had my excuse for a sound system sitting on the top with all my vinyl records in a section underneath...where did those days go...I’ve been told my vinyl collection would now be worth a fortune...if I’d kept them...I wonder what happened to them all...and my CD collection. Just my fucking luck, eh?”

Again, this was the first tinge of positiveness that I had uttered according to Angie though she was concerned that I thought a Mz Webster could be transgender. According to Angie’s response it had little to do with anything...nothing at all! I couldn’t see what all the fuss was about...I was just stating an observation...

“Top floor...a great view. One way you look down the length of the golf course and the other way you can see the ocean...smell the salt air when the wind is blowing in the right direction...and the smell of cut grass when the fairways are cut when the wind is blowing in the opposite direction...” Angie asserted as she stood near the large sliding door that led out onto an acceptable sized balcony that gave you a view of the ocean and the bulky sentinel that was the northern headland guarding the adjacent beach.

“And hear it too on a wild surf day...seen enough? I’ve checked the bedroom and second one that serves as his computer room...nothing of interest to report just a bachelor pad of a bloke who has an overwhelming urge to write...and has someone come in regular-like to do the housework...his toilet and bathroom are clean which supports that theory. A Bachelor rarely ensures a clean toot and bathroom and is too lazy usually to do the chore himself.”

“You reckon this is the home of a murderer? Sure, it would appear he leads a lonely life, but...he’s not really into exercise going on the e-bike and scooter over there...what does he do for a crust?”

“He must do something as he was allegedly jogging up the road two nights ago. He’s in his sixties and has retired from a life in the Commonwealth Public Service, but now he is a Senior Procurement Officer for one of those big retail Book Store chains...I reckon that would affect his pension payments...”

“If he hadn’t selected a lump sum when he retired...maybe that’s how he purchased this Apartment...top floor top draw.”

“Could be I guess...he has a bit of money in shares and over two hundred thousand in the Bank, so the computer examination shows on his life...he doesn’t really need to work”.

“He’s chosen to...he’s found his niche going on all those books. Looks to me like he’s a voracious reader”.

“Mmm...seen enough?”

Angie nodded her head and turned to head for the front door. Joe was back to his normal self by the looks of it. She smiled to herself.

CHAPTER SIX

“What is he like as a Boss? As a worker?”

My opening gambit to the elderly woman sitting opposite us.

“The best we’ve had. He has settled his staff down from the anxiety fuelled days under the Boss before him. Not a good bloke or a good boss at all. Orders Australia wide are on time and of the numbers required. He is a pleasure to know and when I heard he had killed someone...it just didn’t compute. He is not a killer of anything...except maybe his villains that he writes about...I still don’t believe it and neither do any of his staff”.

I nodded...the perfect boss though there is nothing like that anywhere.

“Do you mind if we have a word with his staff?” I requested friendly-like.

“As long as it is okay by them, then yes. I see no harm in the exercise except maybe change your opinion of him...there’s only three in today as the others have taken sick or compassionate leave as this sorrowful event a couple of days ago has rocked them...you can see what they thought of their boss”.

“I’m sorry. I do not have an opinion of the man either way...” I countered quickly in reply. “But the evidence so far collected points to a different verdict...at this stage”. I officiously offered, looking at the older woman sideways as I did not want to draw any opinion of the

man at this stage of the investigation, but Angie would accuse me of being curt. Short with a tinge of anger having already made up my mind on the man...a little too early according to her.

We were a little cramped with me sitting in the bossman's chair while Detective De Longo stood off in a corner looking rather forlorn and lost. Each person we interviewed sat in a visitor's chair opposite me. Thank God there were only three to interview. Even after the first interviewee who left the tiny Office in tears, we were left with an image of a man close to sainthood. A Boss that everyone should aspire to...a 'training lesson' on how every subordinate should be treated; an example on how problems should be solved with all those in the Office given a chance to offer an opinion on how to solve that problem before the Boss makes the final decision...not one of the three gave any negative feedback of their Boss and for him to kill someone? Never! Unbelievable! You have the wrong man was the common cry!

As the third woman left the Office the overseeing Boss sidled into the Office to sit opposite me. A *'I told you so'* smirk on her face. I nodded, scratched the back of my neck before I looked across at the middle-aged woman whom I thought may have a 'teenage' crush on our suspect. A thought from left field that came and went quickly.

"There's no such thing as a perfect boss". I mimicked an old Boss of mine.

"No...but there are those whose whole life has been for that moment when they become a boss, and it is as though that niche has been found...that of the perfect Boss..." She replied.

I nodded as I glanced at an adjacent wall...at a framed montage of book titles.

"They're the best seller books from each year I suppose". I probed nodding at the glass-fronted case that held the montage. Not really interested but I wanted to turn the subject onto something else.

"Hah! No. They are the Title Page of each of the books your alleged suspect has written. Sixty-nine. When someone tells you he has written sixty-nine stories you think okay, that's a lot for one person to write but it's not until you see it like that that the number represents a bloody lot and a lot of hard work for the author. Especially when sixty-five were written in an eight-year period. The last four he says were a real chore collectively taking five years to write. I guess his one main fault is that he forgets time where he would write all night and land here around nine in the morning as though he just got out of bed...or never made it there...yeah, we have found him asleep at his desk here on more than one occasion. We know then that he is in the middle of writing another story...". A smile as she reminisced. "I've read them all...some are quite genius...he's a good writer...it's a pity he has little confidence in his abilities. He could be a millionaire and a world-famous author if only he could sell himself to the right Publisher. Not for the first time I have told him J.K.Rowling was knocked back

by seventeen Publishers before she was accepted...both she and that Publisher are millionaires now all on the back of the Harry Potter series and films...".

"It doesn't seem he makes much for all his endeavours either way." Angie spoke for the first time as she peered at the montage. "Seems his titles are somewhat black...death seems to be a predominant subject...somewhat ghoulish don't you think?"

"Hah! He has never thought his efforts were that good so early in the peace. He cannot remember who it was who told him of the Web Page. He submitted his stories to a web site that asked for nothing but the story from the author and all the reader needed to do was register as a member of the site. All the author revelled in was the kudos from satisfied readers who had enjoyed the read". She had troubled crossing her legs as there was that little room in the Office once the small desk and chairs were positioned. She cleared her throat. "As far as ghoulish titles go, the main character of each title is a Detective from the NSW Police Force working in the Murder Squad Branch. Dead bodies are their day-to-day regime as you two officers would know so yes, if they appear ghoulish, they are!"

I looked hard at the woman sure she was working a little too hard in her defence for the boss one step below her on the business ladder...maybe yes; maybe no but I had my suspicions.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"You're in a better mood today, Joe. Get out of the right side of yer bed this morning, eh? The sun was up, and the birds were all chirping their morning greeting tunes...good to be alive...that's what greets me every morning..."

"Grrr...don't get too cocky, young lady...the day is only half over..."

"Not really, oh wise one. Another hour and we can knock off...how time flies..." She gave a smart-arse smirk to go with the cockiness.

"Oh! Thank bloody Christ for that! I thought the day was dragging more than that!" I exclaimed loudly, smirking at my own joke.

"You're not really enjoying your days here, are you, boss? It's a grind. Hard work just to be here. Why, Joe?" She half-turned to me, a frown to show how she cared for my welfare. "It's been a while since I've heard you laugh or carry-on with one of your outrageous witticisms or theories...and your want to chase out the baddies has severely decreased."

I sat back in the passenger seat of our Unmarked. We were parked in our normal sub-basement car spot forever reserved for us and us alone. Watch the first person who trespasses into the spot as he or she will have my Glock up his nose...well...that's how I felt but I would never put those thoughts into words...that is a total taboo under the Guidelines and Protocols of our bible.

"Why?" I asked as I turned to her. I shook my head, pinched my nose trying to muster up the why...why what? I breathed in deeply before I began. "It's just...it's all starting to look the same...the same old same old. Domestic Violence deaths...they vary little...a swear word here, a swear word there...and then it explodes with neither side wanting to back down as they continue to escalate past the point of no return. Not even an umpire standing between the two would make any difference...know what I mean? You can bet your house on us being involved in a DV death at least once per month...and all our colleagues would have the same involvement rate...yer can bet on it...and our participation means fuckin' nothing. It goes down as another monthly assessment with nothing that can be seen to de-escalate the problem. Politicians have poured millions of dollars into the problem with nothing seen as an improvement...seems to me there is something wrong with the 'battle of the sexes' that cannot be fixed that would afford a truce...this...arrh...this difference is mimicked in best-selling books like *'Men are from Mars; Women from Venus'* and the first of the run...The *'Female Eunuch'* or something similar. The Movies. The TV Shows portray the same inequality in speech, opinion and action...and then with such a high divorce rate we have a high proportion of kids...male and female being reared by the one parent...their mother usually who picks up after them and obeys their wants and needs right through their pre-pubescence and teenage years...it won't change unfortunately no matter how hard we try. There's that challenge...that competition by most of the population to dominate...and the problem is just not in Australia but is world-wide conundrum mainly because more and more women are becoming more self-reliant. Earn their own money while men are very slow in accepting that...that's their problem in being slow to see equality is the way to go...but too few see it!"

"That's why you became a copper, Joe. To help. At no stage was there anyone guaranteeing success to the point where DV deaths and simple homicides failed to exist. Shit Joe, we'd be out of a job if we were that bloody good".

"Mmm..." I was being given a wake-up call by my young partner...half my age! She was still bright-eyed, and bushy tailed like I was once...though I find it hard to remember those days...they've drifted into that bloody great bottomless pit where all homicide cases and memories go. I recall reading somewhere that Murder Squad Detectives had the highest burn-out rates of all ranks in the Force...yeah...I reckon I can believe that statistic...is that where I am? Becoming a burn-out statistic!?

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Good morning, all...” I cheerfully addressed the persons seated around our small conference table wanting it to be established that I would be the Lead in these proceedings.

Angie gave me a glance and an upward movement of her eyebrows.

Me and Detective De Longo my young partner on one side of the small elliptical table accompanied by our boss sitting off to one side wanting to know firsthand the score on this homicide case. He had his doubts on our direction and conclusions.

Opposite us were three reps from the DPP Office. The Lead Officer was Jennifer Stevenson, an old flame and an excellent Lawyer. I had heard through the traps that she had returned to the DPP ranks now in her early sixties. If it had not been for her and her excellent mind, I felt sure I would have been shown the door many years ago. The Standards and Ethics Panel wanted my scalp. That was many years ago well before I had met my Tellie with whispers suggesting Stevenson and I would make a first-rate ‘team’. That was a long time ago now and while the attraction had burnt brightly for some months, it fizzled and died for no apparent reason...well...she wanted a child...I didn’t feel it was the right time in the relationship so she went back to her husband...and had four kids with him which meant she left the DPP for fifteen years. Loving every moment of motherhood which was obvious every time I saw her by chance pushing a pram towards the DPP Offices to stay within the loop as they say.

Her two junior Assists was a bright-eyed young Solicitor not long out of university named Stephanie ‘Steph’ Thonburi. A tireless Research Assistant who will make an excellent name for herself...but out in the private sector. The other was a talkative young Assistant Jeff Blume who had a quick mind and a wit to match.

I introduced Angie De Longo as my partner with nods and smiles the theme all around. I thought I would be the Head of the meeting as I had organised the conference to discuss the chances of taking our suspect to Court. That dissipated quickly as Jennifer took the reins.

“Okay”, she began. “I presume you Joe, and your partner are up to speed with the Final Autopsy Report and associated Blood Tox Statement on our poor victim. I stress at this early stage of proceedings that our attractive young Victim was pissed...full as a goog on that night! On that early morning with traces of cannabis in her system. We have interviewed Mister...arrh...Mister Peter Byrnes, our alleged suspect three times over the past two weeks...he is a somewhat ‘wannabe’ writer who is striving like thousands of others to write that ‘Great Australian Novel’. I cannot see that eventuating sadly after reading only two of his novels though there would be some who enjoyed his style.”

I let out a loud groan.

“You cannot do that. We must be present at every instance...when you interview our suspect.”

Stevenson stood and with arms straight with her fists on the tabletop, she leant towards me with a stoney face...a glare that was meant to tell me who was who.

“We can and we will, Joe. We do not need to hold your hand at every step of the investigation...the interviews were fruitful in that our Suspect does not remember even leaving his Unit which is some five hundred metres down the road from the site of the incident. A typical reaction to a severe bump on the noggin. He does not recall a bloody thing of that night...why he was where he was...or how he got there. One of the things that stuck out was his skinned knuckles with his blood mixing with hers...and her blood all over him. A sure sign of guilt by all those who have been involved on the night...but Joe? There is not one bruise or contusion that would indicate he had punched into the woman or pummelled her in any way for him to receive those abrasions and that amount of cross contamination of blood”.

She sat and took several sips from her coffee container.

“I will repeat again, she was pissed to the eyeballs according to her blood make-up report...as a woman I am envious of the gorgeous shoes she was wearing...she lived one block over on the other side of the road...so why would she be walking in heels on that side of the road with its erupting, warped and broken concrete pathway when the other side of the road was a safer path to walk on...smooth and well lit”. She let that hang while she took another sip or two of coffee. She leaned back in her chair before dropping the bombshell.

“The alleged suspect did not kill our victim...that’s what I now surmise, and I don’t think things will make me change my opinion. It very well could have been an accident with our Mister Byrnes tripping over her body because of the bad lighting...you must then ask why the woman was where she was. She certainly hadn’t walked the length of that footpath. The only answer was she was dropped off by someone in a vehicle. Who and where had they been? She was dressed to the nines. Beautiful designer gown. Expensive shoes and jewellery...where had they been and was it an argument that forced her to jump from the car. In her intoxicated and high state, she has spun...tripped...or both on the gutter edge, falling to hit her temple on an uplifted corner of a warped section of concrete paving...”

She again paused allowing me and Angie to take in this new possibility...she looked at me then Angie as though we were the guilty party in this sorrowful incident.

“If our killer had done the deed, where is the stone that he used to bash in the side of the victim’s temple...the section of loose concrete he used to bash in her head...it’s never been found...and what would be the odds of that instrument of death being the exact size and shape

of that uplifted warped corner of the pathway that she fell onto? Don't bet the house on it being so! I would imagine Forensic Trace scoured that area failing to find such an object. If you re-read their Report, they concluded that our victim fell onto an upturned section of the concrete pathway...her temple slamming into that section of path...that is what killed her. There is blood spattered...now identified as hers...on that upturned section of concrete path."

The room went quiet as both I and Angie mulled over our method of investigation. We were found wanting as far as I was concerned. I as the senior member of the duo had been out with the fairies instead of paying attention at all the facts of the Case. Piecing them together as a cohesive story that could have happened on that night instead of jumping to conclusions as our nightshift brethren had also done. Was it their warped conclusions that had caused us to agree with the supposition based on little as we yet had to receive any Trace or Tox results of both principal participants...they'd only just come in...a couple of days ago!

"Where did she go that night, all dressed to the nines? Who was her partner for the night? Who drives her home? Who stopped a block...a block from her address and allowed her to alight from his vehicle? Was it his vehicle? Or a cab? An Uber drive? Why weren't these aspects of the investigation not examined? Followed up? Do you know where she even worked? At a Real Estate Agency...one of the largest in the State...has her colleagues and boss been interviewed...they have now...by us". She retorted with a look that could kill. I am sure I slumped down in my chair trying to escape the angry glare.

Yep...we'd fucked up! But I would contend we were investigating a homicide where the guilty party was picked to pieces...the victim? Why would one delve too deeply into her history...

CHAPTER NINE

That night, I hardly slept a wink. Sitting outside on the deck wrapped in my favourite doona sipping slowly on a bottle of Scotch. Not a brilliant way to enjoy a good Scotch...straight from the bottle...but then I've never been into etiquette in a big way!

I mulled over the Case again and again wondering how we...meaning *me* had missed all the red flags and obvious signs...and not asking myself what, why, how and when as we stepped through the examination. I was more than disappointed with myself...I felt outraged! I would not have made those mistakes ten years ago...or even five years ago. My mind was never on the Case or its peculiarities this time...more than ever before I thought it was time to hand in my ID card and handgun...time to think seriously about retirement. Bugger the fact that Tellie had another ten years to go before she could retire. I would think of something to keep my

mind busy...before it conked out completely...something...anything! I wondered if other coppers facing retirement went through the same frustrating stages...

CHAPTER TEN

I stepped gingerly into the Unit as though I was trespassing on hallowed ground. Someone did regular housework in the Unit as the smell of disinfectant was strong. I stated as much to Angie who seemed not to hear as she disappeared into the depths of the Apartment.

“She was deaf!” I yelled after her. Angie returned to me as though I was screaming at a funeral service. I pointed to the hearing aids stored in a neat set of boxes on a hallway narrow stand. A variety of hats and woollen and silk scarves hung neatly above the shelf on brass hooks. An assortment of umbrellas stood in their spot on one side while a circular mirror was bordered by beautifully carved timberwork.

Angie shook her head.

“They’re ear-pods, Joe”. She exclaimed “Not hearing aids...doh!”. She spun around, arms akimbo as though she was dealing with an imbecile.

“They’re all wearing them these days...as though there is a virus making everyone hard of hearing. Ear-pods you say. What’s the difference?” My age and ignorance were showing. Angie looked at me possibly thinking that the generation gap was real and on full display.

“You can listen to the radio via blue-tooth from your mobile phone, take messages and have phone conversations and the coolest thing, you can set up all your favourite songs on your mobile phone so you can listen to them play through your ear-pods as you go about your business...a way to dilute a boring day...”

I shook my head. Why anyone would want to walk around listening to their favourite radio station is anyone’s guess. It’s bad enough while you’re driving...nearly everyone must have the radio blaring with the mobile phone connected through the car radio speakers...what happened to the good old days when you returned to the Office. You were given a pile of ‘chits’ letting you know who had called...why have we got to have instant answers...and questions that can’t be answered because you were out of the Office!

I turned to my junior partner with a stern look.

“Throughout the evolutionary process we as human beings have progressed successfully. Each turn of the road gave us a new and improved human being...to find us the most advanced mammal on the planet...except for one thing. Our hearing!! It is kaput when compared to other landlocked species...why hasn't this aspect improved at the same rate as all our other senses? Huh? Tell me why! And do all other landlocked mammals lose their hearing as they age like us humans? I don't know...but I doubt it!”

Angie smiled at me as she walked further into the Unit, thinking perhaps that I had broken through to the other side as my attitude was back to its normal balance. Hurrah, I could almost hear her cry...hurrah!

I ignored her wanderings as I followed my well-worn routine when searching for something...anything.

“Someone else shares this place with our victim. Different style of clothes. Smaller sizes. Not as neat as our recently departed. Her bed is a mess. I reckon it needed changing a couple of weeks ago...” Angie yelled from a second bedroom.

“Give it a little leverage, Angie. Who-ever you reckon it is has been through a lot over recent weeks I would imagine...losing a friend in a most horrible way”.

I heard the entry door being unlocked. I turned to face who-ever. My hand on my Glock. A fierce look to frighten the dickens out of our intruder so I thought.

“Who are you!?” An attractive young woman shouted. “How did you get in!?” She added further. I opened my ID Card and badge to explain that we were the Detectives examining the death of Morrie Morgan.

“Who are you?” I shot back as I still held my ID Card at eye level. “You share this Unit with the recently deceased, huh?”

“Um...yes...sure”. The young woman said nervously as she thought about running back out the front door that she held ajar with her foot. The shopping bags she balanced in both arms perhaps preventing her from doing so. “Um...your partner?”

Angie stepped forward with her ID Card held at eye level. “Detective Angie De Longo. Yes, we have been examining Morrie's death. We felt it about time we got to know a little of our victim...you are?”

The woman noticeably relaxed, dropping several shopping bags onto the kitchen bench with a sigh.

“I need a coffee...you two too?” We both nodded. “I’m Morrie’s younger sister. Rosie Morgan. We have shared this Apartment since Morrie purchased it...oh, some five years ago now. I’ve got to get a housemate in as I can’t afford the upkeep on the place without Morrie...um...yeah”. She busied herself starting up a coffee machine as she began to unpack the shopping bags, placing everything in its proper location. After this was completed and the coffees placed on a central glass-topped coffee table in the centre of the Lounge Area, she finally settled. Relaxed. Took off her puffer jacket, beret, and scarf. Anyone would have thought it cold enough for those articles...to me it was overdressing...it wasn’t that cold.

“Brilliant coffee!” Angie exclaimed, nodding her head. She felt it was the easiest way to gain the confidence of the young woman sitting opposite her. “Great digs!” Angie added as she looked around.

“Yes...close to everything. I can walk up to the shops. The supermarket. The Train Station is underground under the shopping mall. A bus terminus there too. Yeah...very comfortable but by myself, way above my pay grade...and my car could be a luxury I cannot afford...or need”. This had now been repeated several times though there was little we could do about it.

“The night your sister died, where had she been?” Angie began softly.

Rosie Morgan sniffled, swiping her nose with the sleeve of her long-sleeved blouse.

“Arrm...the Annual NSW Real Estate Awards. Morrie was sure she was up there close to an award though she’d been in that position several times before. She works for a city-bound Estate Agency...yeah...she was always up there taking out that Agency’s Annual Sales Award. She has always complained she is beaten every year in the State Awards by some long-haired git from Byron Bay...it’s just her sense of humour...”

“Where were they held?” Angie continued. I figured she had more rapport with the young woman than I would ever have so I sat back and took notes.

“Arrm...this year? I think at that new Casino shaped like a Lebanese cucumber...she rang me to let me know she lost out this year to a git in a shiny sharkskin suit who spoke broken English...hah! Git is her favourite name for any male who rubs her the wrong way”.

“Did she go alone?”

“Arrm...no. Assam ‘Call me Sam’ Faraz. Not a mutual admiration society...but they were work colleagues and the Boss, Colin Muir suggested they accompany each other because it would look good for the Firm...he was also confident one of them would win something on the night...how wrong was he!”

“What do you mean?”

“They may have shared the same table during the awards ceremony and eats, but Morrie said she worked the room more than spending any additional time with that git”.

“How many times did she ring you that night? Is she such a rabid mobile user? Does she ring you often when she is out like the other night?”

“Arrm...gee...yeah...we talk at least two...three times a day. On that Awards night she maybe rang me twice...three times. The last time she sounded pretty over the top and she had the giggles so she must have had a couple of tokes...she rarely touches the stuff, but that night must have been a bore...and her escort was driving her mad...as though he owned her because she agreed with the boss to accompany the Leb git...a bad mix!”

“Who drove her home? It’s a fair way from the city Casino”.

“Sam...she was being a little bitchy as she said he may be expecting something, but he wasn’t getting a bloody kiss from a toad...and it was a fair way out of his way...” She giggled at the memory before it developed into tears.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“Thank you for permitting us to use your Office, Mister Muir...”

“That’s fine”. He replied pleasantly. “Though if you are interviewing one of my staff than I would like to be present, sir”.

“No...yeah. That’s okay by us...um...could you ask Mister Faraz to come into the Office as we believe he may have been the last person to see Mz Morgan alive?”

The man entered seeming not to have a care in the world. As he sat my mobile buzzed. I excused myself to stand in the general office area listening to the Forensic Officer who was at that moment examining Faraz’s vehicle in a sub-basement parking area that was for the express purpose of the Agency and no-one else.

“You say you can see the woman?” I asked, whispering in response, excitement in my voice. “And the vehicle stopped even though you cannot see her alight? Yes? That’s good...excellent! Can you send up the vision onto my phone? Excellent...yes”. I signed off

to walk back into the office apologising for my brief absence. I examined the vision several times over as I sat before looking up at the man. An instant dislike which is never a good way to start any interview.

“Arrh...” I looked the man up and down not liking the first image. A smarmy, swarthy man in a shiny sharkskin suit with a loud tie that said look at me.

“Can I call you Sam?” I asked pleasantly, hiding my initial opinion of the man.

“You can call me anything you like except don’t call me late for dinner”. A practised response that must be getting tiresome to all who had to listen to it time and time again.

“You own a Maserati...AF 220...black in colour. It is parked on the second level in its designated reserved spot. The level for this Real Estate Agency only with access via a Lift from this floor only”.

He nodded. Smiled. His pride and joy by the looks of his demeanour.

“Midnight blue...a special order that added ten months and eight thousand dollars to the price and delivery time...midnight blue...there is no other Maserati in the world with the same colour scheme...with bone Italian leather trim...a wonderful vehicle...a real chick magnet”. He puffed his chest out with pride.

“Until you go to get it serviced, eh?” I couldn’t help myself. He tilted his head in a touché signal...I didn’t like the man.

“Any special significance with the number plates?”

“Apart from my initials, the 220 is when I came second in the annual award show in 2020, beaten by a woman who knew how to flutter her eyelashes, lick her lips and flash her cleavage...she no longer works at the Agency but has her own business in the northern suburbs out to Chatswood...”

“Sam...” Colin Miur interrupted his rhetoric in a quiet but stern voice. “As you know, I will not permit women to wear low-cut dresses or blouses that show too much cleavage. You have been counselled on that fact before...I do not wish to continually remind you of your attitude towards women...we are not in Lebanon or another Islamic country!” He added angrily. I now had my opinion of the man confirmed.

“Sir? Did you attend the Gala Ball Awards this year?” Ignoring the boss’s interruption and what it signified.

“Yes...and again beaten by women who...” He glanced at his boss, lowered his head and shook it. Ran his fingers through the jet black, brushed-back style.

“You accompany anyone?” I asked ignoring his previous comment. You should never ask a question that you don’t know the answer to...it can be a trap for young and inexperienced Dees.

“Yes...the boss here suggested that I take Morrie Morgan thinking I suppose that both of us could be in line for an award which would be excellent PR for the firm. Unfortunately, both of us were way off winning anything though we did win the Office Award for the most sales in dollar value...again for the second year in a row”. I noticed Mister Muir roll his eyes and hide a grimace, shaking his head slightly. Faraz would not notice this as Muir was sitting slightly behind the man.

“Sam? Morrie won the award, not you...you came in a poor fifth. Let’s get that straight, eh?”

“So, Morrie Morgan was your partner for the night?” I continued as though Muir hadn’t spoken.

“Well...I wouldn’t say we shared the same table for most of the night. Morrie spent most of her time working the room...interneting don’t they call it. I got the opinion she didn’t like my aftershave...too sweet is what she said”.

“What did you think about her performance?”

“A bitch with a capital ‘B’. We’re not exactly bosom buddies but still...she made it abundantly clear she didn’t think much of me...just a pick-up and take-home ride that’s what I thought...doing what the boss asked me and her to do but she shared a drink with just about every table in the place...belittling me in so many words I reckon...to everyone!”

“How did you feel about that?” Pressing the point. The man was becoming agitated.

“That she was a floozie...a woman on the lookout for a suitable bed partner for that weekend coming”.

“Sam!” Muir loudly interrupted. “That’s hardly the thing you should say when she’s still warm in the ground...and I know for a fact that she has high morals so I will not tolerate that type of thing spoken about her...if I hear you utter such words about her again, you’re out the door! Hear me Mister Faraz?”

It was obvious that Colin Muir thought little of the man which makes you wonder whether the firm collared the price for the Maserati or whether Faraz footed the bill entirely.

Regardless, 'Sam the Man' was used to being the centre of attention for nefarious reasons. All his sins and 'minor' infringements bubbled to the surface. He was used to being the centre of attention here at work and when the large Lebanese family congregated for that special family meal...he was their hero worth the applause and accolades they poured on him as he was successful in an infidel society.

I walked over to him with my smart phone held so he could see it clearly. He jutted his head backwards as though he had trouble focussing in on the images displayed.

"Sam? This is the dashcam vision from your vehicle. While it does not show the moment you pushed Mz. Morgan from your vehicle, we can guess when that was by the sudden tyre squeal when you took off...not concerning yourself with the young woman's safety..."

"I did not push her out of my car...she hopped out by herself...demanding I stopped to let her out...she jumped out before I had stopped completely."

"Pissed to the eyeballs and as high as a kite so her blood alcohol reading suggested..."

"Huh! I drive right across the city to pick her up...take her to the Awards and after, drive her home which meant I had to drive across the city again to get home myself...the bloody toll roads cost me a fortune that night...that I reckon was worth a smooch...or a feel...she disagreed calling me all the slimy bastards in the world...she deserved what she got!" The man was seething.

"She got out of your vehicle...what then?"

"I went home..."

"Yes...well..." I began rolling the dashcam vision again as I vocalised the events. "Yes...you drive up to the next roundabout and with tyres squealing, you return in the direction you came. See that? That is Mz. Morgan's body lying on the Council verge...it's a bit hard to see...but you can make out her prostrate figure on the ground beside that tree". I rolled the image back to where her body first is noticed on the dashcam. "There...she is lying on the ground...not moving...you would have seen her, yet you did not do a thing...not even slowing down. Did you think of calling an Ambulance. Perhaps stopping to see if she needed any help..."

"She did that herself. She should not have been drinking on the night and taking a toke...no wonder she was unsteady on her feet to the point of falling over...she is nothing but a floozie looking for a free ride..."

"Needing your help...did that slip your mind? After all, it was around four in the morning...a late night for even you..."

I let the vision roll on further. He tried but couldn't take his eyes from the small screen.

"There's the jogger...notice the time? He has been charged with the young lady's homicide death...he isn't the guilty one here...that's obvious as our victim is already dead...or dying and he is still several metres from her body. There, you can see him trip over the inert body...he didn't see it...you more than any other person is responsible for Mz. Morgan's death...you are so stuck up yourself with your own importance...stand up so Detective De Longo can handcuff you!" I was livid. Spittle flying unfortunately missing its mark.

"Don't you touch me, girlie". Faraz demanded between gritted teeth. "I didn't kill her!" He screamed. "I didn't touch her!"

"No...but because of your failure to stop to render assistance, she died. That is what you will be charged with...failure to stop to render assistance. You may have been able to save her life, but you didn't even think of that, you callous bastard". Angie whispered into his ear as she wrestled to handcuff the man.

It took some time for Angie to handcuff the man and as she walked him through the General Office area, she held his arms up by having her straight arm clenched to the man's shoulder so that he was forced to bend his body forward...cowering before a female infidel...the symbolism not lost on most. As she did this, she read him his rights loud enough for all to hear...

She was enjoying it!

CHAPTER TWELVE

I followed Angie into the hospital ward. We followed two Doctors who looked very important, a nursing sister and two wardsmen pushing/pulling an empty hospital bed. Quite a congregation that filled up the small security medical ward at Silverwater Prison that had that feel of oppressiveness. There were no bars on windows or doors as there was not one window and just one door into the one room ward.

"Good morning to you. Mister Byrnes..." Cheerful and non-aggressive.

"Hah! For some I guess, but I am still stuck here having no choices of my own to make. I can't even make myself a coffee when I want...I gotta eat when I am told to eat...go to sleep when I'm told about lights out. I must ring for someone to take me to the toilet...if they are punctual fair 'nuff otherwise I lie in my own shit until help arrives. There are no outside views so I have no idea what

the weather's like...and I cannot have any visitors...when am I getting out of this shithole?" He angrily jangled the manacle that held one wrist and the bed rail. "Why do I need to be handcuffed to the bed. I doubt I could walk let alone run from this bloody cage!"

I stepped around one of the doctors to stand in the patient's eyeline.

"Mister Byrnes? All charges relating to your connection with the death of Maureen 'Morrie' Morgan at around oh-three-thirty-seven hours on the morning of the first of this month have been dropped. You are a free man..."

"I'm what...free from this nightmare? Fair Dinks? No bullshit? Get me out of here! Fucking quickly!" The man roared. "Get me out of here, hear me!? Again, jangling the manacle.

I guess I couldn't blame him for his stance. As a 'wannabe' author it could be a good foundation for a successful novel. Knowing I was innocent of all charges but instead I was locked up facing Court time then jail time of at least a dozen years would be torture of a special kind to my way of thinking and a good storyline if ever there was one. I stood there nodding my head...words were not enough. The man had tears rolling down his cheeks thankful for his freedom at last.

One of the doctors cleared his throat. "Mister Byrnes, it is not that simple, I am afraid. Your injuries have not been healing as well they might. A mixture of your age and a lifetime of smoking will cause that I am afraid. We will need to transfer you to a Post-op Ward at Westmead Hospital. We will want to keep you there until we think a 'second skin' transfer over the wound will be successful..."

"What do you mean...I'm going from one sort of incarceration to another...you bastards!" He began to sob. "You bastards..." He repeated softly, as though he now accepted his fate.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"Joe? After you get settled... a word".

The tone of his voice sounded ominous. I walked to my desk to deposit my ID Card, Badge and Glock into the lockable drawer. Angie raised her eyebrows as I stood to return to the Boss's Office. I shrugged not knowing what was going on...I'd soon learn.

"Close the door, Joe" He commanded. "Sit".

That didn't sound good...he looked sternly at me before glancing at the file he held. He frowned as he scanned the documents flipping impatiently from one folio to the next for some minutes before looking up at me.

"There's no easy way to say this, Joe. You are the senior member of this Squad. Younger Dees look up to you...but you're letting yourself down badly...and them". He dropped the file on the desk in front of him, leaning in to pick it up again. It was noticeable he was very uncomfortable...and nervous. "Arrh...I have received numerous reports and complaints on your behaviour, your attitude and general demeanour. Be advised you are on notice, and I am in two minds to confine you to your desk..." He glanced up at me expecting some type of reaction from me. Inside I was flabbergasted, squirming with anger as never before in my entire career had I been hauled over the coals in such a manner. Instead, I sat that like a stone effigy not batting an eyelid. "Joe? Have you anything to say in your defence?" He asked a little flummoxed at my non-reaction.

I slowly shook my head coming out of my fugue state of disbelief and anger. I slowly sat up and leaning both elbows on either chair arm I leant forward.

"Boss? Umm...I have little to say...I know I haven't been myself for more than a few months now. I put it down to the realisation that my retirement date is slowly crawling forward, and I have nothing planned...and at the same time I have so many things I want to do but know there isn't enough time. Boss?" I looked down at my hands now grasped tightly together. "I'm scared of being useless...of no use to anybody...of dying...of being unable to perform my duties on a day-to-day basis...I'll be by myself until Tellie retires which won't be for another ten years about...may be seven if she offers up all her entitlements which she does not want to do...she wants that golden egg to help see us through forgetting on purpose I think, my pension and lump sum payment".

The Boss nodded as though he understood.

"I thought as much...I've seen it before especially amongst those who have a higher motivational mindset than others on the floor. Their whole life is the cop force...nothing much else. Like you. You need a break...your nerves are wearing thin...and you're wearing other peoples' nerves thin also..."

"Boss..." I began to interrupt.

He held up a hand to silence me.

"Hear me out Joe..." He sighed deeply before beginning. "Neville Shute? Head of the Police Intelligence Branch? He's due for major surgery next week. You would fit in nicely in an acting role while he recuperates...nothing more than six to eight weeks. It could be the break that you need away from this place. PI is more subdued. Whoever set the Branch up for those

coppers who still had something to offer while confined to wheelchairs, callipers, crutches, walking frames or walking canes should have a star added to his name. The Branch has become the 'go to' place on information relating to any con or crim who has done time...or just charged awaiting sentencing. You can find out more about a crim...even his bloody grandmother for God's sake by conversing with a member of the PI Branch than any other way. The connections can astound you...all the work of Neville Shute and his merry band whose only alternative was to sit in a convalescent hospital or at home watching daytime television. These people got together with Neville's leadership and with a few canny computer geeks created a system that has hooks into every crim in NSW and more besides..."

I began to shake my head.

"Don't be so negative Joe. You know you need a break from this place...if you don't, it will be a long straw that has your name on it for dishonourable discharge...mark my words. The old days are gone where longstanding Officers are protected from themselves so they can claim their pension package at the due date".

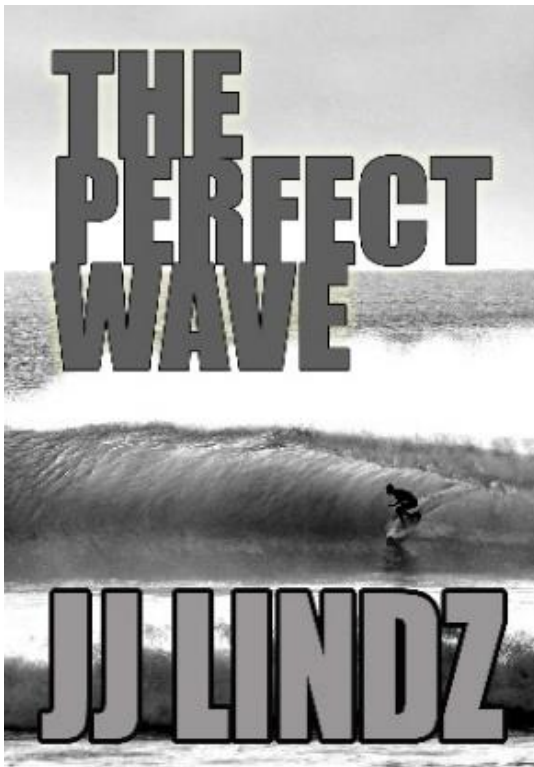
"Aren't you doing the same thing for me?" I asked curtly.

"Yes...in a way I guess I am...with one difference, you will be doing valuable work for a short period which may help in your general demeanour and attitude. You know most of the people there. You've worked with a few over the years and the joint works on joy juice...you've seen it. Think about it Joe...it could save your arse which would be a good outcome for such a short period of time".

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I sat at the desk for some time just thinking. I had enjoyed the several hours I and all the crew had sitting in their wheelchairs around the desk reminiscing. Bringing up faces and names from long ago. No name caused me to frown or sit me back in my chair. They all...every name recalled the happier times as though the brain had diluted the terrible parts.

I smiled...replaying the afternoon when we all had smiles and laughter and copious amounts of coffee drunk while bringing up those faces and times...it would seem this was the only Branch where coffees were delivered from the Plaza Coffee Jar on demand. I guess these guys



are entitled to a little ‘sugar’ as their lives would not be easy though their combined attitude of cheerfulness denied this observation.

I waved to everyone as they exited the floor for their knock-off time...bang on seventeen hundred hours though I could not accuse one person of being a clock-watcher...it wasn't like that. Three specially designed buses were made available through the generosity of fellow police officers throughout the Force and other areas besides for the specialised passengers. Take home...pick up. Most wouldn't have a fifty-hour job without them...

I doodled for some time, eventually bringing up ‘Photoshop’ where I created several Title Pages. A simple chapter followed which I edited several times until I was satisfied. It was getting onto midnight before I realised the time. Sitting back, I was

impressed with my efforts not too sure which one I would use. Wondering where this sudden inspiration would go...

I'll ask Tellie for her opinion.

The idea of an autobiographical piece about my first days in the Police Academy and my several years working undercover with my mate Bazza Holtz. Driving the length of the north coast surfing beaches keeping an eye out for cannabis transportation from the north coast hinterland into Sydney. Spending more days surfing than surveilling...driving in a fully fitted-out panel van with a souped up V8 and a custom mattress in the back...six boards on top...and boom speakers for the latest groove songs...those were the days...an introduction to the Cop Force that few experienced!

I saved my efforts and downloaded the results onto my Smart Phone. I stood, gathering up my coat and as I exited the Office, I whistled softly to myself...the first time in absolute years!

I knew what I was going to do...

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

He stood, arching his back as he did so. He glanced at the time in the bottom right-hand corner of the computer screen. Twenty-one hundred hours. About the latest he could now manage since his accident. No more nights punching away on the computer then going for a jog in the early hours of the morning. Those days were gone...as had the easy nature of his story writing. He never knew whether it was the accident or the death of that poor girl that had changed him...but it was after he came out of hospital that he really noticed the change.

Was that reality or just so many words saved on his computer? Had he experienced all that had been written, or did it not occur?

He'd leave than conclusion to the reader...

He walked unsteadily out into the kitchen to make himself a warm toddy...warm milk with Scotch...it helped him sleep. He took a sip of the concoction before stepping out onto the wide balcony. Hearing the waves shoosh onto the shore and the salty air always lifted his spirits.

He wondered whether it had ever been done before...introducing the author, himself into the storyline...

He finished off the toddy, nodded and headed for bed, satisfied with his efforts.

pcb

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